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ABSTRACT

This final report describes the objectives, activities and outcomes of a federally funded project that was designed to provide a high quality, interdisciplinary graduate degree program in Early Childhood Special Education with an emphasis on Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (ECSE/TESOL) at the University of Miami, Florida. A portion of the coursework focused on infants and toddlers with disabilities, birth through two. However, the major focus was to prepare personnel to work with children with disabilities, aged three to five, including those who may come from homes where English is not the primary language. The report describes: (1) recruitment strategies used by the program; (2) advising, financial and administrative support given to the students during their course of study; (3) coursework, field and practicum/internship experiences offered by the program; (4) program evaluation methods and results; and (5) suggestions for improvement. Advisory board evaluation feedback identified the following as strengths of the program: (1) key personnel in the program; (2) the practicum/internship experience; and (3) student support in the form of tuition assistance. Suggestions for improvement included: (1) longer practicum experiences; (2) hands-on workshops on feeding, positioning, and handling medically fragile children; (3) administering assessment instruments; (4) constructing classroom materials; and (5) a practicum/internship orientation meeting with the University of Miami supervisors to review guidelines and requirements. (SG)

**TRAINING PROFESSIONALS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL
EDUCATION /TEACHING ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER
LANGUAGES (ECSE/TESOL)**

*UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
FINAL REPORT*

Project Funding Period – 8/15/1997 – 8/14/2001
No-Cost Extension Period – 8/15/2001-8/14/2002

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I Project Summary

The purpose of this project was to improve the quality of personnel preparation in the State of Florida and in the nation by providing financial support for students to participate in a preservice program at the graduate level aimed at preparing highly skilled teachers of young children with disabilities, many of whom may come from homes where English is not the only language. This proposed program provided tuition support and incentives to recruit highly needed personnel in the area of Early Childhood Special Education/Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (ECSE/TESOL). While a portion of the coursework and field experiences focused on birth through age two infants and toddlers with disabilities, the major focus of the program was to prepare personnel to work with children with disabilities, ages three to five, including those who may come from homes where English is not the primary language. The rationale behind the program was that a) there continues to be national and state shortages of special education teachers at all levels; particularly those who also have preparation in TESOL; b) implementation of the mandates of PL 99-457 and 105-17 throughout the nation is creating a need for an ever-increasing number of early childhood special education teachers, especially as our methods for identification of children with disabilities continue to improve; c) there is an ever-increasing sub-group of the United States population, especially in South Florida, that are English language learners; and d) the State of Florida is now requiring that all teachers certified in any area of education who may have English Language Learners (ELL) in their classes must receive preparation in TESOL in order to maintain their certification.

The ESCE program in Miami-Dade County is currently providing services for 1796 students, ages three to five, (69% male; 31% female) in 150 classrooms and in over 70 schools or community agencies. A significant proportion of the children in early childhood special education classes in the Miami-Dade County Public School system are both minority (approximately 59% are Hispanic; 25% are Black, non-Hispanic; 14% are White, non-Hispanic; 1% are Multiracial and Asian) and Limited English Proficient (estimated at 54% of the Pre-kindergarten Exceptional Student Education [ESE] programs).

With research and evaluation data pointing to the effectiveness of early intervention, and this recognition leading to the development of legislation at the state and federal level to expand ECSE programs, we can anticipate a dramatic increase in services for children with disabilities between birth and five years of age in the next several years. Florida, with its tremendous population explosion, can also expect the numbers of young children with disabilities, especially those from homes where English is not the only language, to increase dramatically. There are few existing training programs for personnel that are addressing this projected need, especially in the State of Florida. The ECSE/TESOL personnel preparation program provides a steady flow of prepared, highly-qualified teachers who understand the special needs of children with disabilities, especially those who are also English language learners, from three to five years old, and who can provide the essential services with an awareness of the role and value of an interdisciplinary model and the role of the family.

II Project Status

Objective 1. Recruit qualified graduate students that represent the diversity of South Florida and are interested in working with young children with special needs and their families.

Accomplishments:

The University of Miami has developed a cooperative and comprehensive recruiting system. Letters and flyers announcing the program and available funding were mailed to the homes of all schools teachers in Miami-Dade County Public Schools (n=15,936). In addition, flyers were mailed to all elementary schools in both Miami-Dade and Broward Counties, to accredited private schools in Miami-Dade County, to agencies providing services to young children with and without disabilities and their families (e.g., Head Start, ARC, Easter Seals), and to graduates of targeted majors from the University of Miami and Florida International University. Announcements were also made in graduate and undergraduate classes, in the Newsletter sent to University of Miami ECSE students and Advisory Board members, and in the Hammond Times (a publication of the Office for Multicultural Student Affairs). Furthermore, the ECSE program worked collaboratively with the Princeton Review to offer a GRE prep course for prospective students.

Key University administrators were informed of the program, including procedures for recruiting students, registration, and curriculum development. The key administrators included: Dean, School of Education; Chairperson, Teaching and Learning; Co-Directors of the Mailman Center, and the Principal of the Debbie School.

The Project Coordinator attended the Miami-Dade County New Teacher Orientation, the University of Miami Clinical Teacher Breakfast, and the Broward Showcase of Success Conference. Furthermore, the project coordinator disseminated information at the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Annual Conference in New Orleans, and the Division of Early Childhood (DEC) Conference in Washington DC. As interested applicants inquired about the program, application packets were mailed to them. Following the initial application mailing, students received follow-up mailings that provided additional information about the program and the university. Students who submitted a portion of the application received phone calls from either the Project Coordinator or a graduate assistant. In addition, the School of Education hired a full-time graduate coordinator who established an extensive marketing/recruitment plan.

Outcomes: More than four hundred (400) application packets were mailed to prospective students during recruitment. A total of thirty-one (31) students received funding through this program totaling \$163,068.50. Twenty-one (21) students have graduated from the program. Three (3) are still completing their coursework and program requirements (i.e., professional portfolio and oral examination), and are expected to graduate in 2002-2003. Seven (7) students dropped the program for various reasons, some including medical and personal issues.

Objective 2: Provide initial and ongoing advising, financial, and administrative support to the graduate students during their course of study.

Accomplishments:

Advisory support was provided by the Project Co-Directors, the Project Coordinator, and the faculty members. Students met with their advisor to discuss and complete a program of study. Prior to their first semester of study, students attended an orientation where they were familiarized with the University of Miami, the School of Education, and the ECSE program.

Communication was maintained with the students through electronic communication mailings and a quarterly newsletter designed to inform them of: (a) events in the South Florida area as well as the rest of the country related to ECSE and TESOL; (b) changes in legislation and policy related to ECSE and TESOL; (c) procedures related to graduation and program completion; and (d) upcoming conferences, institutes, and professional development opportunities. Students were also informed by telephone, e-mail, letters, and flyers posted on campus and the ECSE Bulletin Board of events they were expected to attend. Additionally, the University of Miami Early Childhood Special Education team hosted a dinner each semester as well as ECSE "Conversations" twice a semester to better acquaint students with their faculty advisors, project staff, and peers in a non-threatening, social, and informal environment. Furthermore, the Early Childhood Special Education program developed a web page designed to provide students with up-to-date information about ECSE/TESOL, courses, professional development seminars, and announcements.

Financial management and the maintenance of all financial records are accomplished by the Project Fiscal Manager who works under the direction of the Project Co-Directors along with the Business Manager of the School of Education.

The Advisory Board met twice each year to discuss and review the competencies needed for teaching young students with disabilities as well as to complete questionnaires to identify areas in the program that needed improvement or change. Additionally, weekly meetings were held with the ECSE/TESOL team to keep all personnel updated on various projects involved in the implementation of this program.

Another resource provided to the students in this program is the ECSE Resource Library. The library is continually updated and a list of all materials is available. A comprehensive evaluation of all videos in the library was conducted during the fall semester and an abstract was written and placed on the cover of each video. The materials available to students include relevant journals, books, testing materials, curricula and children's literature that focuses on exceptionalities.

Outcomes: The coursework of each student was evaluated and an individualized program of study was developed and approved for each student by their faculty advisor. This assures that all competencies in the ECSE/TESOL program are met and that the practicum/internship and field experiences match students' goals and interests. Students in this program, along with faculty and Advisory Board members, were kept informed through the newsletter, mailings, e-mail, class announcements, and the ECSE Web Page. Additionally, the maintenance of the students' records in a graduate database allows for ready access to current student records which assists in monitoring individual student

goals. Monthly accounting reports provided by the Office of Sponsored Programs are the outcome of the budgetary actions.

The ECSE Resource Library currently contains 353 books, 82 screening/assessment instruments, and 115 videotapes, and four audio-tapes/CDs, as well as a number of brochures, journals, and newsletters. These materials represent current information available in the areas of: *early childhood education, special education, disabilities, child development, assessment, family support, curriculum, medical issues, diversity, and technology*. This library was an invaluable resource for supporting students in their coursework and faculty in their instruction.

Objective 3: Provide a high quality, interdisciplinary graduate degree program in Early Childhood Special Education with an emphasis on English Language Learners that will prepare teachers to effectively meet the individual needs of young at-risk and disabled children and their families from a multicultural community.

Accomplishments:

The program was designed to ensure that the graduate students meet Florida's endorsement requirements for early childhood special education (Pre-K Disabilities Endorsement) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). A course rotation was developed for students that enrolled them in classes on a schedule specifically designed for their program of study.

Students attended and participated in a number of professional development seminars which included: 1) APA Style; 2) ECSE Portfolio Overview; 3) Developmentally Appropriate Practices; 4) The Culture of Education; 5) Infant and Toddler Curricula; 6) High/Scope Curriculum; 7) Assistive Technology and the Prime

Time Van; 8) "Early Intervention, Inclusion, and the Natural Environment,"; 9) "Young Bilinguals: Adding Languages or Subtracting?"; 10) Family Support Plan (FSP) and the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) process; 11) "Feeding and Positioning"; 12) Young children with Autism; 13) "Grandparents as Caregivers"; 14) "Conscious Discipline"; 15) "ESOL Language Development"; 16) "Parents Can Dream New Dreams"; 17) "Rethinking Parental Involvement in Multiple Contacts"; and "I Can Problem Solve". In addition, students were involved in field-based and practicum/internship experiences working with young children with disabilities (ages birth to three) and their families in a variety of private and public settings in the local community during their summer agency rotation.

Meetings with the Project Co-Directors, the core ECSE/TESOL faculty, and the Teaching and Learning Department Chair were held to assure that all competencies were being met. Additionally, the meetings were used by the Project Co-Directors to receive feedback on the ECSE/TESOL Professional Portfolio, which is used to evaluate whether students have adequately mastered the competencies of the ECSE/TESOL program. Furthermore, the ECSE team scheduled routine communication with adjunct faculty teaching courses in the ECSE/TESOL program.

Outcomes: All students in the ECSE/TESOL program were enrolled in courses that follow a specified program of study to ensure students receive both the coursework and field and practicum/internship experiences necessary to meet the needs of young children with disabilities who may be English Language Learners.

All students in the ECSE/TESOL program completed the ECSE/TESOL Professional Portfolio, the TESOL written comprehensive examination, and an oral examination as culminating requirements for successful completion of the program.

Objective 4: Maintain student records and financial accounts.

Accomplishments:

Financial accounts were reviewed weekly and reports were generated for the Principal Co-Directors. The Project Fiscal Manager managed orders for materials as well as student accounts. Student records are maintained in a graduate database that allows for ready access to current student information.

Outcomes: The Project Fiscal Manager was responsible for expenditure control for staff and students (i.e., reimbursements) as well as processing payroll for all personnel. She also processed tuition support statements for each student every semester. Necessary budget revisions were made as per US Department of Education's request.

Objective 5: Evaluate the program and make necessary revisions.

Accomplishments:

Faculty advisors and Project Co-Directors were engaged in ongoing monitoring of the program in order to stay apprised of program quality and student satisfaction. Student feedback was regularly encouraged via focus group interviews, program surveys, and email and telephone dialogues. Written evaluations are also completed at the time of registration for summer and spring classes. The purpose of these evaluations is two-fold: (1) to assure that the students are successfully meeting the program competencies, and (2) to determine levels of satisfaction with the program. Additionally, informal meetings with students and the Project Coordinator have been followed up with meetings between

UM faculty and the Co-Project Directors. The following information was collected during the 2001-02 academic year.

ECSE/TESOL Survey - Spring, 2001, and Fall, 2001

Of the students enrolled in the ECSE/TESOL program, nineteen (n=19) students completed a survey during the Spring 2001, and thirteen (n=13) students completed a survey during the Fall 2001. Survey data focused on sample characteristics and evaluating aspects of the program including program coursework, faculty, staff, and advisors.

Demographic information (Spring, 2001). Of the students that completed the survey in the Spring of 2001 (n=19), sixteen are female and two are male. One student did not respond. Forty-seven percent are Hispanic, 37% White, 11% Black, non-Hispanic, and 5% did not respond. The majority of students had certification in Exceptional Student Education (ESE) (68%) specifically in the areas of Varying Exceptionalities (VE), Mentally Retarded (MR), and Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD). Other areas of certification included Early Childhood Education (26%), Elementary Education (11%), Pre-K/Primary (5%), and Reading (5%). Fifteen students are currently teaching in a public school setting, two in private settings, and two in other settings (i.e., faith-based). Of those working, twelve are ESE teachers, four are ECSE teachers, and three are General Education (GE) teachers. The average total number of years of teaching for the sample is 5.9. Only two students had completed their practicum/internship experience at the time of completion of the survey.

Demographic information (Fall, 2001). Of the thirteen students who completed the survey, 100% are female. Thirty-eight percent are Hispanic, 38% White, 16% Black,

non-Hispanic, and 8% indicated Other. The majority of students had certification in ESE (85%) with field specialties in SLD, MR, VE, Emotionally Handicapped (EH), and Educable Mentally Handicapped (EMH). Other areas of certification included Elementary Education (15%), Reading (15%), Pre-K/Primary (8%), and Montessori (8%). Eleven students are currently teaching in a public school, one student is in a private school setting, and one is in an agency setting. Of those working, eleven are ESE teachers, one is a GE teacher, and one indicated "Other". The average total number of years of teaching for the sample is 6.4.

Program/Coursework (Spring, 2001). Eighty-four percent of students who completed the survey agreed that the program had assisted them in mastering the needed skills, concepts, facts, and knowledge needed in the field of ECSE/TESOL and would recommend the program to a friend. Identified strengths of the program included: (a) the high quality of instructors; (b) accessibility of instructors to students; (c) the Project Coordinator; and (d) support services (i.e., APA seminar and ECSE library) offered by the program. Overall, 74% of students who responded to the survey felt prepared to organize and implement a program for young children with disabilities who are also English language learners.

The majority of students reported that they were highly satisfied with the overall content and quality of the ECSE courses (84%) and that the ECSE courses integrated both practical and theoretical principles. In contrast, students expressed lower levels of satisfaction with the overall content and quality of the TESOL courses (68%) and the integration of practice and theory in these courses (74%). Students shared that they wanted to see improvements in the TESOL component of the program specifically in

having regular meetings with adjunct faculty members teaching the courses and discussing with them expectations about course requirements.

Although the majority of students were satisfied with their coursework and felt it was effective, many students perceived that their courses were "*rushed*" especially those that were scheduled during the summer semesters. Moreover, some students had difficulty with the scheduling of courses and seminars and recommended that the Project Coordinator and the faculty be encouraged to have "*late day*" office hours and that professional development seminars be held on weekends (i.e., Saturdays).

Program/Coursework (Fall, 2001). The majority of students (83%) who completed the survey agreed that the program had assisted them in mastering the needed skills and knowledge in the field of ECSE/TESOL and 73% would recommend the program to a friend. One student commented, "*Overall, the ECSE/TESOL program has provided me the education needed to be an effective educator.*"

All students reported that they were highly satisfied with the overall content and quality of the ECSE courses and that the ECSE courses integrated both practical and theoretical principles. In contrast, they expressed low levels of satisfaction with the overall content and quality of the TESOL courses (46%) and the integration of practice and theory in these courses (39%). Students commented, "*I have been very disappointed in my class, TAL 653. I feel that the teacher has not been able to educate me on the material in which this course consists of...*" and "*The TAL 653 class does not relate to activities, strategies or problems presented in a classroom with ESOL students.*" In addition, one student suggested that new faculty be observed early in the program (semester) to alleviate future concerns.

All students indicated that the program had addressed their individual needs appropriately and that they felt prepared to participate in the assessment process. The majority of students had taken advantage of the support services offered (92%). Seventy-seven percent of students either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that the ECSE/TESOL program had prepared them to work with young children with disabilities who are also English language learners.

Faculty/Staff/Advisors (Spring, 2001). Eighty-four percent of the students who completed the survey were satisfied with the quality of instruction provided by the ECSE faculty and 89% felt the ECSE faculty was accessible to them. Seventy-four percent of students were satisfied with the quality of instruction provided by the TESOL faculty and 89% also felt that the TESOL faculty was accessible to them. The majority of students agreed that the Project Coordinator and the program faculty advisors were accessible to them (80% and 74% respectively).

Faculty/Staff/Advisors (Fall, 2001). Students who completed the survey were satisfied with the personnel involved in the program and their accessibility to them. In addition, students expressed that the new project coordinator was quite knowledgeable about the program. The following representative quotes were written by students, *"I am elated that I have a new project coordinator who is very knowledgeable about the program,"* and *"I feel very well informed and ready to complete my program."* All students either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that the program faculty advisors and the Project Coordinator were accessible and assisted them in answering questions about the program and their program of study. All of the students indicated that they felt the ECSE faculty was accessible while 58% felt the TESOL faculty was accessible. All

students were satisfied with the overall quality of instruction provided by the ECSE faculty, whereas only 38% were satisfied with the quality of instruction provided by the TESOL faculty.

Open Ended Questionnaire - Spring, 2002

Students completed a questionnaire (n=23) during their spring advising session with four open-ended questions that focused on the program quality and recommendations for improvement. At the time of the survey students had completed an average of 16 credits.

Program Quality. Students were asked to identify the top three strengths of their program, areas in need of improvement, and describe the effectiveness of coursework and activities.

The major strengths of the program identified were (a) the project coordinator/advising (n=14), (b) faculty (n=13), (c) course content (n=5), (d) evening courses (n=4), and (e) seminars (n=3). Other identified strengths were resources, support, flexibility of practicum/internship, cost, and receiving two endorsements upon completion.

The major areas of the program identified by students as needing improvement included: (a) portfolio (n=5), (b) none (n=5), (c) TESOL (n=4), (d) flexibility for working teachers (n=3), and (e) consistency of information (n=2). Other areas identified by students included too many meetings, too much work, and more personal communication from faculty. Students shared, "*Portfolio requirements should reflect more of the class projects that are required in each course*" and "*I feel the program is complete.*"

The majority of the students (87%) who responded to the question regarding the effectiveness of the content and activities of the courses (n=15) agreed that the courses have been effective. One student remarked, "*All coursework was reflective of current research. I am eager to go out into the field and put all my acquired skills into practice.*"

Program recommendations. Students were asked to provide recommendations/suggestions to the ECSE Area Committee. Suggestions included:

- Reduce the amount of work in the portfolio;
- More flexibility for working students;
- Make assignments more practical, "hands-on";
- Be more specific about program requirements; and
- Separate ECSE/TESOL students from TESOL students in classes

Survey of Graduate Students in TAL- Spring 2002

Students in the ECSE/TESOL program (n=22) completed a survey during the Spring 2002 sent to all graduate students in the department of Teaching and Learning (TAL). Survey questions focused on program coursework, faculty, advisors, preparedness for the workplace, and overall quality. Students were also asked to comment on program strengths and weaknesses and to share suggestions for program improvement.

Coursework. The majority of students agreed that: (a) that the program integrates both practical applications and theoretical principles (100%); (b) the course offerings meet their perceived professional needs (96%); and (c) that the overall content and quality of courses taken in this program is either equal to or better than the quality of coursework taken at other universities or with which the students are familiar (87%).

Faculty/Advisors. Overall, students reported being satisfied with the personnel in their program. The majority of the students (87%) agreed that the quality of the faculty is above average and that the faculty is accessible (96%). The majority of students (96%) also rated the quality of advising as above average. One student shared, *"This program has cooperative teachers and a wonderful faculty."*

Preparedness for the workplace. The majority of students in the program reported that they felt prepared to: (a) teach the content in their subject area (100%); (b) implement effective instructional practices (100%); (c) teach students with cultural and linguistic differences (100%); (d) teach students with disabilities (95%); and (e) implement technology in the classroom (92%) as a result of the program.

Overall quality. The majority of the students who completed the survey agreed that the program was above average quality (82%) and that they felt comfortable recommending the program to a friend (82%).

Strengths/Weaknesses and Recommendations. Identified areas of strength in the program included faculty, advising, scheduling, resources, peer rapport, and two endorsements. One student commented, *"It is a wonderful opportunity to gain 2 endorsements into 1 and be able to work in those areas after graduation."* Identified weaknesses and areas for improvement in the program included portfolio assignments, flexibility, and TESOL instructors. Students recommended, *"Integrate portfolio assignments with each course"* and *"Make the assignments more meaningful and realistic."*

Practicum/Internship Experience Evaluation – Summer, 2001, and Summer 2002

Four-Week Practicum/Internship Experience

Students in the program completed a survey in the Summer 2001 (n=22) and in the Summer 2002 (n=34) with Likert-type items and open-ended questions. Survey questions focused on students' perceptions of their four-week practicum/internship experience in a Pre-kindergarten (Pre-K) ESE classroom working with young children with disabilities and their families, ages three to five, or a specialized placement. Specifically, students were asked about their perceptions of the practicum/internship setting, university supervisor, and clinical supervisor.

Perceptions of practicum/internship settings – (Summer 2001). All students either strongly agreed or agreed that they felt prepared to enter their practicum/internship experience (100%), and the majority (91%) also believed their practicum/internship setting was useful in meeting their career goals, provided them with experiences that were educationally challenging and stimulating, and that the school and personnel understood the nature and purpose of their role as practicum students. Eighty-six percent responded that their practicum/internship experience provided opportunities for them to learn how to teach young children with disabilities. Many students recommended their setting for placing future practicum students and perceived the practicum/internship experience to be positive and rewarding. Students shared the following quotes: *"I would recommend this internship experience to another student because of the support and guidance that I received from this internship setting"; "I think all aspects of my internship were positive and rewarding. The setting was challenging, interesting, and with a great deal of new information";* and *"I had an outstanding experience this summer. I was given*

the opportunity to utilize all the knowledge and strategies that I have learned in the ECSE program."

Additionally, one student shared her thought about the importance of having students complete a practicum/internship experience even those with teaching experience, *"I was thrilled with my internship placement. At first I did not think this internship was necessary because I was already a teacher. However, I was completely wrong. I was exposed to so much information when it comes to Pre-K ESE. I was very thankful for this opportunity and believe everyone should have such an enjoyable experience."*

A few students identified areas of weaknesses within their practicum/internship experience and these included: (a) the short number of weeks in the practicum/internship experience making it not the *"reality"*; (b) the lack of structure and organization at one particular specialized setting; and (c) clearer guidelines as to the specific obligations and requirements needed to complete the practicum/internship experience as outlined in the practicum/internship handbook and portfolio guides. One student commented, *"What I would also recommend is that...specific obligations are written for both to see. My specialized placement handbook was outdated and did not specify what requirements are necessary to meet the portfolio requirements. When [my supervisor] gave me information it was not acceptable to ECSE [Committee]. These things need to be clearly specified."*

Perceptions of practicum/internship settings – (Summer 2002). All students either strongly agreed or agreed that: (a) their practicum/internship setting was useful in meeting their career goals; (b) their practicum/internship provided them with opportunities to learn how to teach young children with disabilities; (c) their practicum/internship provided experiences that were educationally challenging and

stimulating; and (d) that the school and personnel understood the nature and purpose of their role as practicum students. Additionally, a vast majority of students responded that they felt prepared to enter their practicum/internship experience (97%). Many students recommended their setting for placing future practicum students and perceived the practicum/internship experience to be positive and rewarding. Students shared the following quotes: *"This experience gave me a great understanding of the way in which High/Scope works. I also came away with valuable ideas and knowledge for working in my own class"*; *"The entire setting was phenomenal. My placement allowed me to really understand and see how everything fit together: the schedule, pictures, technology.."* and *"I loved the internship! My teacher was an excellent model for me. I had a great experience getting to interact with the children and learning hands-on about High/Scope..."*

A few students expressed concerns about their practicum/internship experience. One student who stated that her *"internship experience was wonderful"* expressed concerns about her placement in a Profoundly Mentally Handicapped (PMH) setting. She commented, *"I feel I learned a great deal in regards to positioning, OT/PT, etc... however, I feel I missed out on experiencing the High/Scope curriculum, outdoor activities and other developmentally appropriate practices that occur in perhaps VE/Autistic setting."* Another student remarked, *"I would not recommend this practicum/internship due to the fact the experience was too short."* Furthermore, one student commented, *"I did not feel challenged during my practicum/internship. I've been a teacher for 8 years and feel qualified to teach children of all ages."*

Perceptions of university supervisors – (Summer, 2001). All students either strongly agreed or agreed that their university supervisor was (a) available to them for direct supervision and consultation; (b) understood their professional and personal needs for learning and experiencing; and (c) provided them with meaningful, timely, and constructive feedback. Ninety-five percent of students responded that their university supervisors were able to give them sufficient independence to accomplish goals and 86% believed their university supervisor modeled the technical skills and professional competence necessary to teach young children. Many students commented about the willingness of university supervisors to help and assist them during their practicum/internship experience and their high level of understanding and feedback. One student shared, "*[Supervisor] was extremely supportive and helpful. She offered great advice and constructive criticism. I enjoyed having her come into class and learned a great deal from the anecdotes she shared about her classroom experience.*" Another student commented, "*I feel she was capable and understanding of what interns need in regards to information and support.*"

Perceptions of university supervisors – (Summer, 2002). All students either strongly agreed or agreed that their university supervisor (a) was available to them for direct supervision and consultation; (b) was able to give them sufficient independence to accomplish their goals; (c) provided them with meaningful, timely, and constructive feedback; and (d) modeled the consultation skills and professional competence necessary to teach young children with disabilities and to work with others in the field. The majority of students (97%) also felt that their university supervisor understood their professional and personal needs for learning and experiencing. Many students stated that

they would recommend their supervisor to future practicum students. They commented that their supervisors were very supportive and encouraging, and provided excellent feedback. One student shared, *"She was very positive about my teaching and gave suggestions in a non-threatening way. She was always available for me and made me feel like she was truly interested in what I gained from the experience. I loved her immediate feedback."* Another student commented, *"My university supervisor was my rock."*

One student expressed a concern with her supervisor's timeliness in providing feedback. She commented, *"I felt that there were a couple of instances where a less than timely manner of feedback was given. We never did go over the final evaluation."*

Perceptions of clinical supervisors – (Summer, 2001). The majority of students either strongly agreed or agreed that clinical supervisors (a) were available to them for direct supervision and consultation (95%); (b) were able to provide sufficient independence to accomplish goals (95%); (c) understood their professional and personnel needs for learning and experiencing (91%); (d) provided them with meaningful, timely, and constructive feedback (91%); and (e) modeled the technical skills and professional competence necessary to teach young children (91%). Many students commented that their clinical supervisor provided them with ample opportunities to implement their ideas and encouraged them to be independent in the classroom. One student said, *"She answered every one of my questions and provided me with constructive feedback. She shared all of her experiences and materials with me. She showed me the Pre-K handbook and the High/Scope handbook. She gave me all of the freedom and guidance I needed, allowed me to write key note experiences, and lesson plans. It was a wonderful*

experience!" Moreover, many students noted that they would recommend their clinical supervisor to other practicum students. One student shared, "I would recommend this clinical supervisor to future interns. She exhibits appropriate adult/child interaction and [is] competent in leadership skills."

Perceptions of clinical supervisors- (Summer, 2002). All of the students either strongly agreed or agreed that their clinical supervisors (a) were available to them for direct supervision and consultation; (b) were able to provide sufficient independence to accomplish goals; (c) understood their professional and personnel needs for learning and experiencing; and (d) provided them with meaningful, timely, and constructive feedback. In addition, the vast majority of students felt that their clinical supervisor modeled the consultation skills and professional competence necessary to teach young children (97%) and that overall the supervision received was adequate and helpful (97%). Many students commented that their clinical supervisor was an excellent role model and very supportive. One student said, "*[She]s was an excellent resource person and guide. She taught me stimulating and creative ways to engage all learners in the educational process.*" Another student commented, "*[My supervisor] was very supportive.... He even burned CD's for my future class.*" Furthermore, many students stated that they would recommend their Clinical Supervisor to future practicum students. One student stated, "*[My supervisor] is an outstanding teacher. She allowed me to incorporate ideas and provided me with assistance and accessibility. She employs developmentally appropriate strategies and activities.*"

Two-Week Rotation Experience

Students in the program completed a survey in the Summer 2001 (n=22) and Summer 2002 (n=35) with Likert-type items and open-ended questions. Survey questions focused on students' perceptions of their two-week rotation experience in a variety of private and public local agencies, schools, and organizations providing services to young children with disabilities (predominately 0-2) and their families. Specifically, students were asked about their perceptions of the rotation settings and their recommendations for retaining these rotation settings for the future as well as other settings that would be beneficial and insightful to future practicum students.

Perceptions of the rotation settings – (Summer 2001). Ninety-five percent of students either strongly agreed or agreed that the two-week rotation provided opportunities to learn about local resources available to them as teachers who are working with young children with disabilities and their families. The majority of students felt that one of the major strengths of this rotation experience was that they were exposed to a large variety of agencies, schools, or organizations that provided services to young children with disabilities and their families. Students shared, *"We saw several centers that provide various services for children. I didn't know many of these places existed and now I know which kids to refer to which services. I learned about evaluating children and made several contacts, especially at FDLRS"* and *"The strengths are that we got the opportunity to visit and get tours of special facilities – to then be able to refer parents to."* Additionally, 91% of the students felt prepared to enter their two-week rotation experience.

However, only 50% of students responded that the two-week rotation provided experiences that were educationally challenging and stimulating. Moreover, 41% of students either strongly disagreed or disagreed that the agencies, schools, or organizations understood the nature and purpose of their role and responsibilities as students in the rotation experience. Many students commented that the scheduling of visits to these agencies, schools, or organizations was an area that needed to be revisited and improved by the ECSE program. This student shared the following comment, *"The University must also work out better scheduling to avoid 'down times' such as having a full day of no interactions [with students] due to a teacher workday."* Another student said, *"The summer is not really 'regular' and the day was long. I got much from the morning routines; however in the afternoon the children nap – especially because its early childhood and time was wasted. I realize that this is a good time for the teachers to talk to us. But some did not wish to."* Students recommended scheduling two or more schools/agencies on the same day.

Many students were also concerned about the degree to which these agencies, schools, or organizations understood their roles and responsibilities as university students during the two-week rotation. The majority of students felt that the contact person on-site lacked clarity about who the students were, what their purpose was at the site, and what they were expected to complete as part of the rotation. One student said, *"There was no clarity of the roles of the [university] students at the facility. I felt that at a couple of sites we were in the way and disrupted the director's schedule for hours."* Another student commented, *"Many of the site supervisors didn't know what we were supposed to do."* Students recommended limiting the number of sites to visit during the entire two-week

rotation as to decrease the amount of scheduling demands and burdens on the site contact person and having more than one contact person at each site to take the lead in orientating the university students during the rotation.

Perceptions of the rotation settings – (Summer 2002). Eighty-six percent of students either strongly agreed or agreed that the two-week rotation provided opportunities to learn about local resources available to them as teachers who are working with young children with disabilities and their families. Furthermore, eighty-three percent of students either strongly agreed or agreed that the two-week rotation provided them with the knowledge to rate the quality of an early childhood facility. One student commented, *"It reinforces my ability to analyze each facility and ponder the idea, if it were my classroom, I."* Seventy-four percent of students either strongly agreed or agreed that the rotation provided experiences that were educationally challenging and stimulating. The majority of students felt that one of the major strengths of this rotation experience was the exposure to a variety of community resources and classroom settings that provided services to young children with disabilities and their families. Students shared, *"Being exposed to the different centers was an excellent experience because I had the opportunity to witness the diversity of care out in the community"* and *"I believe that the two week rotation gave me the experience needed to be familiar with the different agencies available for children with disabilities. I also enjoyed observing the different therapists available."*

Many students reported satisfaction with their preparedness for their two-week rotation. Eighty-six percent of students either strongly agreed or agreed that they understood their assignments. Seventy-five percent of students either strongly agreed or

agreed that they felt prepared to enter their rotation, and 68% either strongly agreed or agreed that the orientation assisted in preparing them for the rotation. However, students felt that the agencies could have been better prepared for their visit. Only 48% of students either strongly agreed or agreed that the agencies, schools, or organizations understood the nature and purpose of their role and responsibilities as students in the rotation experience. One student shared the following suggestion, *"Making the staff aware of our role. Many teachers and paraprofessionals were not aware of what we were doing there. Some didn't look at us or talk to us and some left us in the classroom for many minutes."* Students also indicated that there was a need for better coordination between the university and the sites. One student commented, *"Some of the centers were not prepared for the large number of students coming. We felt we were imposing in some instances."* Students also recommended making changes in the scheduling of the rotations. Some students suggested splitting the practicum/internship into one week before and one week after the summer school rotation. Other students were concerned about the strict time guidelines. One student remarked, *"The only area I feel that needs improvement are the hours required at each center. I feel there is no reason to stay at these centers once children lay down for their nap."* Another student observed, *"Some of the agencies were not equipped to provide assistance to students for so many hours."* Many students also recommended spending only one day at each center, especially at Florida Diagnostic & Learning Resources System-South (FDLRS-S), and a few students mentioned that Prescribed Pediatric Emergency Care (PPEC) should be a half-day only; however, it must be noted that two students shared that they would have preferred being

assigned to one site for the entire rotation. Moreover, students remarked that they would have liked to have the opportunity to request the programs that were of interest to them.

Recommended sites for rotations – (Summer, 2001). The majority of students recommended the following sites for future consideration for the two-week rotation: (1) neonatal intensive care unit; (2) juvenile detention center; (3) United Cerebral Palsy; (4) Linda Ray; (5) Lighthouse for the Blind; and (6) MacLamore.

Recommended sites for rotations – (Summer, 2002). The majority of students recommended the following sites for future consideration for the two-week rotation: (1) PPEC; (2) juvenile court; (3) Linda Ray; (4) Debbie School; and (5) FDLRS-S (for one day only). Although some students shared that they would recommend all of the sites that they visited, other students specifically mentioned sites that they would not recommend for future rotations. Those that were specifically mentioned by a few students were: (1) Association for Retarded Citizens (ARC); (2) Easter Seals; (3) United Cerebral Palsy (UCP); and (4) Head Start. It must be noted that one student recommended Head Start as a future site and another student remarked, *"Easter Seals was not an example of a quality center, but I still think it was a valuable experience."*

Advisory Board Evaluation Feedback-Spring, 2001 and Fall, 2001

Spring, 2001. A total of eight (n=8) surveys were completed by Advisory Board members. Members range from being directors of programs providing direct services to children with disabilities and their families, to professors in teacher education programs. Seventy-five percent of the members felt that graduates of the program are prepared to be effective ECSE teachers and have the necessary skills (i.e., teaching and working with families). Furthermore, 87.5% of the members agreed that Advisory Board meetings are

an important and worthwhile component of the program and provide the program with advice about future directions to take.

Identified strengths of the program included: (a) key personnel in the program; (b) the practicum/internship experience; and (c) student support in the form of tuition assistance. Members shared the following comments, *"The Co-Directors of the ECSE program, are significant strengths. The attention to meeting students' needs and assuring that they are knowledgeable and well-prepared professionals"* and *"The internship experience offers opportunity to implement knowledge acquired. Clinical teachers are supportive and knowledgeable."*

Suggestions for improvement included: (a) a practicum/internship orientation meeting with the University of Miami supervisors to review guidelines and requirements; (b) longer practicum/internships; (c) hands-on workshops on feeding, positioning, and handling medically fragile children; (d) administering assessment instruments; and (e) constructing classroom materials. For example, one Advisory Board member commented, *"Each student must give a battery of assessments to a child or a few children – include LAP-D, Early LAP, RLDC or OLPS (for LEP children). Also, use PQA from High/Scope and assess a learning environment. Develop a behavior management plan for a specific (real) child in a class and try to implement with teacher. Make some song boards, nursery rhyme boards, story boards, to be used during first month of school."*

Fall, 2001. ECSE Advisory Board members were asked to complete a questionnaire providing feedback for program improvement. A total of seven (n=7) questionnaires were completed by members including directors and staffing specialists from programs that provide direct services to young children with disabilities and their

families and a practicum/internship supervisor. Three of the respondents indicated that they had ECSE students as practicum students in their program this year. All of the respondents agreed that graduates of the ECSE program are prepared to be effective ECSE teachers and indicated that they would recommend that other professionals and agencies hire graduates of the ECSE program. Members shared the following comments: *"Quality program,"*; *"Dedicated, serious professional attitudes and solid knowledge base,"*; *"The students are able to set credentials in this state when they graduate from this program,"*; and *"The program is well established and is staffed by individuals with extensive knowledge of the field."*

Identified strengths of the program included: (a) faculty, (b) diversity of the students, and (c) community partnerships linking theory and practice. Advisory Board members commented: *"The new faculty appears to be very dynamic to add to the expertise that exists,"* and *"They collaborate with M-DCPS to offer theory along with practice. The educational program is not presented in isolation."*

Identified areas in need of improvement included: (a) more time for students to internalize concepts; (b) critically reviewing journal articles; and (c) practicum/internship experience. One Advisory Board member gave the following suggestion, *"Arrange classes and experiences so students can do practica during the 8:00 – 2:00 traditional programming hours."* Another member who identified summer practicum/internships as needing improvement also stated, *"Steps have already [been taken] for improvement."*

RECOMMENDATIONS

Some recommendations from students for program improvement are outlined below:

1. Improvements need to be made in the content and quality of the TESOL courses and the courses need to do a better job of integrating theory with practice. Many students were specifically concerned with TAL 653. *"The TAL 653 class does not relate to activities, strategies or problems presented in a classroom with ESOL students."*

OUTCOME:

The ECSE program has since initiated semester meetings with TESOL faculty members who instruct our students. These meetings have allowed the program to assist with the planning of course activities and provide information (via guest speakers, lectures, materials) to assist students with making an early childhood and ESOL connection.

2. New faculty should be observed early in the semester to ensure appropriate instruction.

OUTCOME:

The ECSE program's role regarding student/faculty issues has been one of support and guidance. It is the role of the Department to observe and review its faculty members, not each program. However, the ECSE Program Co-Directors have since become active in the hiring (i.e., interviewing) process of new or adjunct faculty and feel it better serves the students in this capacity.

3. TESOL courses in the ECSE/TESOL program should be separate from courses in the TESOL program.

OUTCOME:

The overall goal and design of the ECSE/TESOL program was to provide a Master's degree program that met the combined needs of preparing high-quality personnel to work in the field of ECSE and TESOL. The union of these two programs has in fact served as a crosspollination of the two fields and therefore bridged the gap between research and practice. Therefore, course-scheduling changes were made.

4. Students would like to see more flexibility in the program for working individuals.

OUTCOME:

The ECSE program offered evening courses geared to meet the needs of working professionals. In addition, many program activities (i.e., professional development seminars) were administered on weekends.

5. Program requirements need to be specific and consistent.

OUTCOME:

The ECSE program provided private and group sessions where program requirements were discussed and reviewed. The program developed a Student Responsibility Sheet as well as initiated mandatory overview meetings where major program requirements were addressed (i.e., Portfolio Overview Meeting,

Practicum Application Meeting). All students are provided with a Student Responsibility Sheet, Master's Agreement, Program Sheet, Graduate Bulletin, Manuals, and Guides to ensure program requirements are not only reviewed, but documented and therefore consistent.

6. The professional portfolio should be abridged and modified to reflect course content and integrate more classroom assignments.

OUTCOME:

All students in the ECSE master's degree programs are expected to meet the ECSE Core Competencies as well as the State of Florida's Twelve (12) Accomplished Practices as outlined in the Professional Portfolio. These competencies and practices are acquired through coursework, observation, and experience teaching during field and practicum/internship experiences. It is the ECSE program's philosophy that the Professional Portfolio present more than a collection of coursework, but also an extension of coursework via application-based assignments where research is put into practice and critical areas like literacy and culture and diversity are highlighted and addressed.

7. Improve the scheduling of visits, and the coordination and communication between the university and the sites during the two-week rotation experience.

OUTCOME:

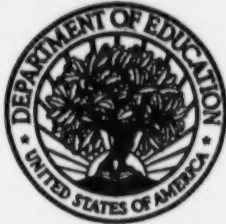
The ECSE Area Committee will review the two-week rotation experience and refine it to meet the expectations of the practicum students as well as that of the

agency. The ECSE Area Committee has met with the Advisory Board to gather their feedback and recommendations to better improve and plan activities that meet the professional development needs of our students.

Some recommendations from the evaluator for program improvement are outlined below:

1. Review and revise the course outlines for the TESOL courses and discuss student concerns with the faculty teaching the courses.
2. Modify the professional portfolio using student input. For example, invite a group of students to participate in a focus group in which they provide specific suggestions for revising the professional portfolio.

Communicate with the on-site contacts for the two-week rotation experience regarding both the needs of their staff and the needs of the university students. Prior to the rotation beginning, send each site a flyer [which can be hung for all staff to see] outlining the goals and expectations of the experience.



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